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Author: Josephine Preston Peabody
Illustrator: Elizabeth Shippen Green Elliott

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOOK OF THE LITTLE PAST ***

The Book of the Little Past

*'I watched, ... even as it were a
Sparrow that sitteth upon the
house-top'*





MAKING A HOUSE
MAKING A HOUSE

Ghe Book of
the Little
Past.

By Josephine Preston Peabody



Illustrated by Elizabeth Shippen Green

Houghton Mifflin Company
Boston 1910 New York

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the Little
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**TO Alison
AND OLDER CHILDREN**

NOTE

Of the poems of child-life brought together in this book many are wholly new; some are reprinted from "The Singing Leaves," published in 1903; and others have appeared in Harper's Monthly Magazine, to the editor of which I am indebted for permission to reprint them.

J. P. M.

JULY, 1908

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Making a house



First of all, I draw the Smoke
Trailing up the sky;
Then the Chimney, underneath;
And Birds all flying by;
Then the House; and every Window,
Watching, like an Eye.

Everybody else begins
With the House. But I
Love the Smoke the best of all;
And you don't know why!...
Here it goes,—like little feathers,
Sailing up the sky!

The Busy Child



I have so many things to do,
I don't know when I shall be through.

To-day I had to watch the rain
Come sliding down the window-pane.

And I was humming, all the time,
Around my head, a kind of rhyme,

And blowing softly on the glass,
To see the dimness come and pass.

I made a picture, with my breath
Rubbed out to show the underneath.

I built a city on the floor;
And then I went and was a War.—

And I escaped, from square to square
That's greener on the carpet, there,

Until at last, I came to Us:
But it was very dangerous.—

Because, if I had stepped Outside,
I made believe I should have died!

And now I have the boat to mend;
And all our supper to pretend.

I am so Busy, all the day,
I haven't any time to play.

Sunset



Those islands far away are mine,
Beyond the cloudy strip;
And something beautiful, besides:—
I think it is a Ship.

Wind



Let them call it just *The Wind*,
And tell me not to grieve.
But I know all it left behind,
And more than they believe.

I know; about the far-off lands,
Where people never sleep;
They hide their faces in their hands,

And rock, and weep, and weep.

And I too little, all alone,
To go and find them yet;—
But Oh, I hear!—When I am grown,
I never will forget.

Late



My Father brought somebody up,
To show us all, asleep.
They came as softly up the stairs
As you could creep.

They whispered in the doorway there,
And looked at us awhile.
I had my eyes shut up; but I
Could feel him smile.

I shut my eyes up close, and lay
As still as I could keep;
Because I knew he wanted us
To be asleep.

Cakes and Ale



I'm always glad when Andrew comes.
If only I am there,
He stays awhile, and talks to me,
As if he did not care.

He took me to some Music once,
When it was all for me.
And Oh, I had a splendid time!
And he said, So did He.

It lasts as if the Music still
Went round and round the sky.—
He said he had a good time, too;
And I said, So did I!

The Journey



I never saw the hills so far
And blue, the way the pictures are;
And flowers, flowers growing thick,
But not a one for me to pick!

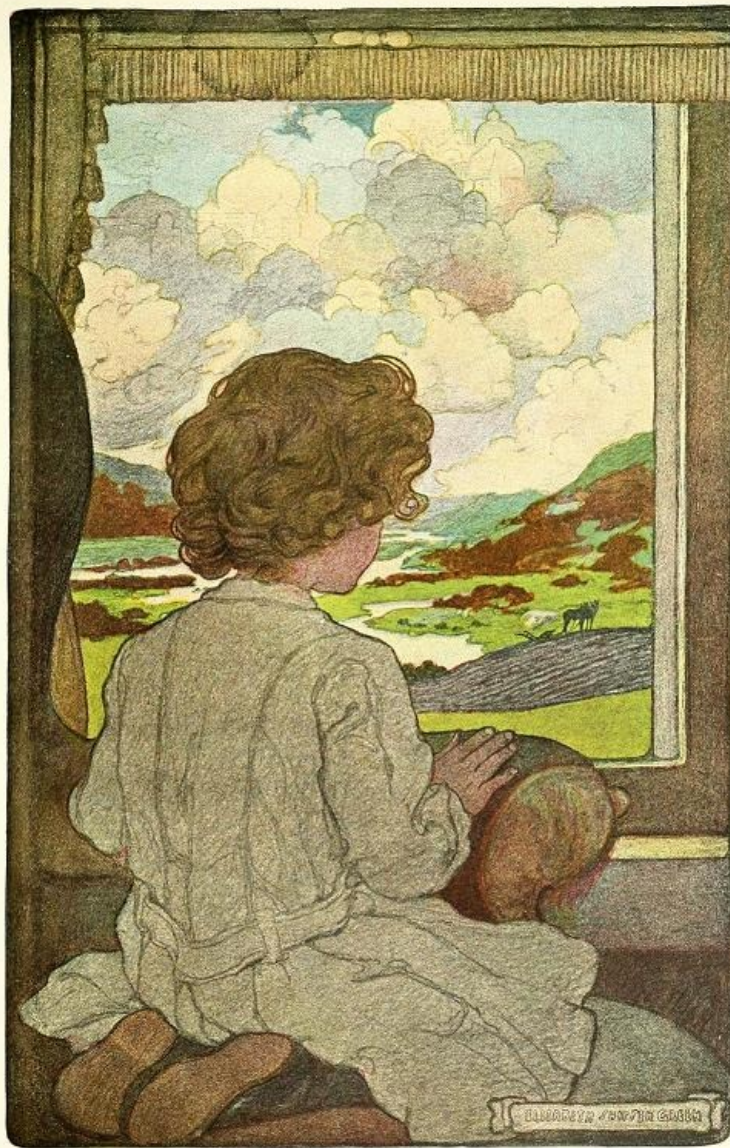
The land was running from the train,
All blurry through the window-pane.

And then it all looked flat and still,
When up there jumped a little hill!

I saw the windows and the spires,
And sparrows sitting on the wires;

And fences, running up and down;
And then we cut straight through a town.

I saw a Valley, like a cup;
And ponds that twinkled, and dried up.



THE JOURNEY

THE JOURNEY

I counted meadows, that were burnt;
And there were trees,—and then there weren't!

We crossed the bridges with a roar,
Then hummed, the way we went before.

And tunnels made it dark and light
Like open-work of day and night.

Until I saw the chimneys rise,
And lights and lights and lights, like eyes.

And when they took me through the door,
I heard It all begin to roar.—

I thought—as far as I could see—
That everybody wanted Me!

Pigeons Out Walking



hey never seem to hurry,—no,
Even for the crowd.
They dip, and coo, and move as slow,
All so soft and proud!
You can see the wavy specks
Of bubble-color on their necks;
—Little, little Cloud.

Cloud that goes, the very way
All the Bubbles do:
Blue and green, and green and gray,
Gold and rosy, too.
And they talk as Bubbles could
If they only ever would
Talk and call and coo!

—Till you try to catch one so,
Just to make it stay
While the colors turn. But Oh,
Then they fly away!—
All at once, two, three, four, five—
Like a snowstorm all alive,—
Gray and white, and gray!

Concerning Love



wish she would not ask me if I love the Kitten more than her.
Of Course I love her. But I love the Kitten, too; and It has Fur.

Curls



It happens that way in the world
With everything you see.
Some people have their hair all curl'd,
Some straight as straight can be.
It is a Mystery.

Yes, some have hair that waves and clings,
And does all kinds of curly things;—
And some not ever, till they Die.
And nobody knows Why...
And some,—already born with Curls,
Some of them are not even Girls!

I always think,—of Curly Hair,
It looks as if the Curls came there
The way I hum around a song
More things than really do belong.
The happier I feel, the more
I sing, I never heard before!
I curl more music round the Air,
The way it looks with Curly Hair.

[*Envoi*]

But you may sing all day, you know;
You cannot really make it grow.
And you may know it is Not Fair;
But that won't give you Curly Hair.

I Was Lost

*[Oh, the Day that I was Lost, I never shall forget:
I wake up in the night sometimes, and think It's Happening Yet.]*



She let me go, a minute.
She said she would take care;
But she let me go, a minute:
And then— She wasn't there.

Everything grew awful

That was good before.
And the Faces didn't look
Like people any more.

It made you feel like Wrinkles
All over you; and Cold.
It made you feel two hundred
And eighty-nine years old.

It was like being Homesick,
And Hurt; when no one Cares.
It was exactly like a Wreck;
And people smiled like Bears.

I thought that my own Mother
Had just—Forgotten me!
I thought that God had lost me,
Like a Penny in the Sea.

The Noise all seemed to grow and grow
And roar until it drowned me.—
And I could only say,—'I'm Lost.'...
And then, at last,—they Found me,
—They Found me!

Polite Visitor



feel polite, outside the door;
But when it should begin,
I can't remember Not to ask
If just their Cat is in.

And if the Sun should sprinkle through
Along the floor that way,
I can't remember what I do
If I am Urged to Stay.

And when I've shaken hands all round,
—No matter how I try,
I can't remember Not to go
And Kiss their Dog good-by,
—Good-by,
—Good-by!

*Yes, thank you, please.—They're Very Well;
—I think I'd better go.*

*Yes, thank you, please. I'm always late;
My Mother told me so.
Yes, thank you!—If I Have to Bring
A message,—yes, I'll come;
—And if your Bird will only Sing;
—And when your Cat is home.*

The Mystic



People say to me,
'A penny for your thought.'—
And I can't remember thinking;
And I should think I ought.
I wasn't sleeping, either:
I know that, because
I saw things out of both my eyes.
I wonder where I was.

Now I'm back, I see them
Sitting all around;
And the noise, together,
Makes a purring sound.

But I know Something More
Than just awhile ago.
I know Something More!—
I wonder what I know.



THE MYSTIC

THE MYSTIC

Market



went to Market yesterday,
And it is like a Fair
Of everything you'd like to see;
But nothing live is there:
—The Pigeons, hanging up to eat;
And Rabbits, by their little feet!—
And no one seemed to care.

And there were Fishes out in rows,
Bright ones of every kind;
Some were pink, and silver too;
But all of them were blind.
Yes, everything you'd like to touch.—
It would not make you happy much,
But no one seemed to mind.

And loveliest of all, a Deer!—
Only its eyes were blurred;
And hanging by it, very near,
A beautiful great Bird.

So I could smooth his feathers through,
And kiss them, very softly, too:
But Oh, he never stirred!

Little Side-Streets



Why are some streets so different?
The kittens all are long and thin;
I think they have more flowers there,
But broken things to grow them in.

Why do they like the house so high,
With such a little of the ground?
And do you think they ever see
The Moon before it's old and round?

Why won't I like to play there, too?—
With all the funny things to eat,
And all the carts with little bells,
And dancing-music in the street?

And if I can't, then why do they
Stay out, the whole of evening?—
Why do they always seem to have
Just Not-Enough of everything?

Why don't you come?—Why can't I go?
It isn't Fair!—What makes it so?—
If they don't like it? Don't you know?
Why do you always never know?

Chestnut Stands



Wonder why you feel, somehow,
It's wrong to leave a Chestnut stand,
With all so much of what you want
In both your pockets and your hand.
I always have to turn around;—
It sounds so hurt—I don't see why—
That little high-up crying sound
I don't remember by and by.

There is not anything so good
As Chestnuts (when they're hot) can be.
It must be fun to count them out,
With One for You and One for Me;
And yet it stays so doleful there,
—For all the People going by,—
And breathing frosty on the air,
Like something trying not to cry.

—It Isn't something I was Told!—
I know it's small and scared and thin.—
It's like when both your hands are cold,
And Pockets you can't put them in!
—Like something happened long ago;
—Like feeling Homesick,—yes, and Shy;
Like being Sorry,—when you know
You won't remember, by and by.

The Play's the Thing

never dared to look away
While they were tuning so,
For fear the Curtain might go up,
—And I not see it go!—



Then all at once, it all went Dark;—
To make you hold your breath and hark,
—Oh, hold your breath and hark!

Excepting where the Curtain was,
It stayed as black as night;
And that kept still one minute more,
All edged across with light:—
Then Up—and Up—
And Oh, so soon,
It was like all Inside the Moon,
—Yes, sitting in the Moon!

And Oh, how Beautiful they were!—
And could we see them near?—
And Oh, how brave at everything!
But it was somehow queer

To see that smiling way they had:
They smiled so much, but not all glad;
—No, not so always glad.

I wish we couldn't go away;
I wish it would begin
All over, now, and never end;
I wish we were Locked In!
Oh, can't we see it all again?
To-morrow!—Sunday! Monday? When?
—Ah, when, when?

Windows



nce, and in the daytime too, I made myself afraid,
Playing Eyelids-Up-and-Down, with the window-shade;
Till the Houses seemed to watch People going by;
And they kept me looking, too,—wondering where and why.

*If I were that Other Boy,—if I were those Men,
Going by with things to sell,—who would I be, then?*

Windows with their eyebrows high; windows like a frown,
Thinking it all over, so, with the curtains down;
Tall ones that are somehow sad, narrow ones that blink,—
All the Windows you can see make you think, and think.

*If I were that Old Man, and I looked up at me
Watching from the window here, Oh, then how would it be?*

Sometimes they are golden, with shining in their eyes.—
Every time the sun sets, it happens like surprise,—
And so bright, I almost forget the dream I made;
But I keep it, for the days I want to make myself afraid.

*If I were that Boy who limps,—now it's dark and snowing,
And if I were going home,—Oh, where would I be going?*

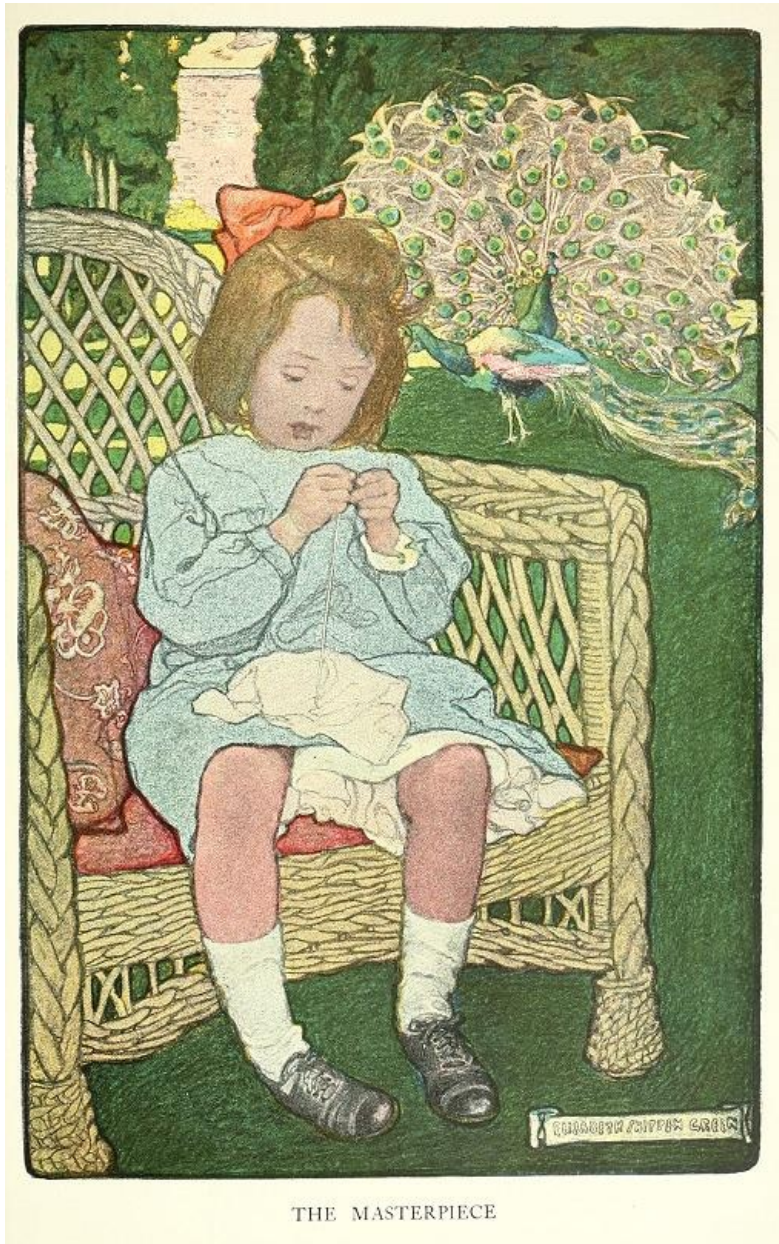
The Masterpiece



y Mother cut it out for me,
And started it, so I could see;
And then she turned some edges in,
And let me take it to begin.
I made it. But I did not know
How very long it takes to sew.
I took a long time for that stitch;
And now it's there, I don't know which
Is better. But not one is small,
And they are not alike at all.
That side was very hard to fix.
And then, the needle always pricks:

But you must hold it, and take care,—
Because the point is always there;
And knots keep coming by and by;
And then, no matter how you try,
The thread comes out of its old eye!

But some way, now I have it done,—
I think it is a Pretty One.



THE MASTERPIECE

Ode on the Dog

I



My Pitch-dark Angel with a Rosy Tongue,
My Own—my Own,
Why can't the grown-up Things we live among
Let us alone?
Why do they have to talk the livelong day
About such silly things?
But if they must,—why can't they, anyway,
Have either Tails or Wings?

II

Of Course I cannot love them as they are,
As much as You.

Why aren't they ever really Beautiful,
 —They too?—
 With curly coats, like wool;
 And floppy ears to pull;
 Yes, and a wide pink mouth, with such a Smile!
 Yes, and a Tail that beats time all the while;
 Beautiful, Beautiful!—
 And golden stars, for eyes,
 Behind the darkest trees
 (Till your hair's parted!)
 Why can't they have such darling ways as these?—
 Why can't they be so lovely when they sneeze?—
 Why can't they ever be so tender-hearted,
 Or even look so wise
 As You?—
 My Wonderful (even if you Won't say *Mew*),
 My True Prince in Disguise!
 Why can't they be
 As funny, when they try to sing a song?
 And when, for everything that I can do,
 They Won't Agree,—
 Why can't they think they're always in the wrong?
 —Like You!

III

Why you,—O Precious Thing,
 You are swift (almost) as any Sparrow.—
 Over the tall grass how you arch and spring,
 Yes, like a bow and arrow!—
 Oh, and how good to see you, when it snows,
 Plough a long, lovely pathway with your nose!
 (No one grown-up could do it, I suppose.)

IV

My dearest Blessing and my Very Own,
 Even when I am grown,
 Never do you forsake me!
 If you don't go to heaven when you die,
 —Neither will I:
 Nothing can ever make me!
 I won't go,
 For all that they can do.
 No; on the steps Outside, and down, below,
 Forever and ever and ever, I'll stay too!
 —With You.

The Sorrows



If This is all it will be like,
 I wish to Die;—I don't care how—
 While I am very, very young;
 As young as almost Now.

They never felt what Sorrow was;
 Or never learned their Golden Rule;
 They say, *These are your happiest days*,
 —With School,—School,—School!

When Saturday's all out of breath
 With all the week before in sight;—
 And Monday coming after you
 Spoils every Sunday night!

And Nothing done but yesterdays;
 And Nothing coming but to-morrows!
 Don't cheer me up. Please let me be.
 —I have the Sorrows.

Secrets



have a secret to myself,
That no one else can see.
I hum it over to myself,
And no one hears but me.
—Something You don't know!
I knew long ago.—
And the more I never tell you it,
The more it gets to be.

It makes me feel as purry
As the Kitten on your knee.
It makes me feel as round and warm
As the Sparrow on that tree;
It makes me puff my feathers out
The way he puffs out his.—
And if you think I haven't one,
I'll tell you what it is,
—Maybe!

The Christmas Tree



know you're in the house;
I know you are in there;
I feel the green and breathing
All around the air.
I know you're safe and warm;
I know you're very near.
*Oh, darling Tree,
Do you hear?*

I promised not to look
(The way I did before),
But I can hear you purring—
Purring, through the door:
A green, soft, purring;
Just as if you knew:
*Everybody here
Loves you.*

Don't feel lonely,
Now you are in-doors.—
Wait for all the shining things
To-morrow,—all yours!
Then you won't know what to think!—
All over Candle-light.
*—Oh, darling Tree,
Good-night.*

And I love you, I love you;
And everybody, too.
And so does the market-man
That brought us you!
And if you haven't Anything
For me, this year,
*—I love you. Good-night!
Do you hear?*

Candle-Light



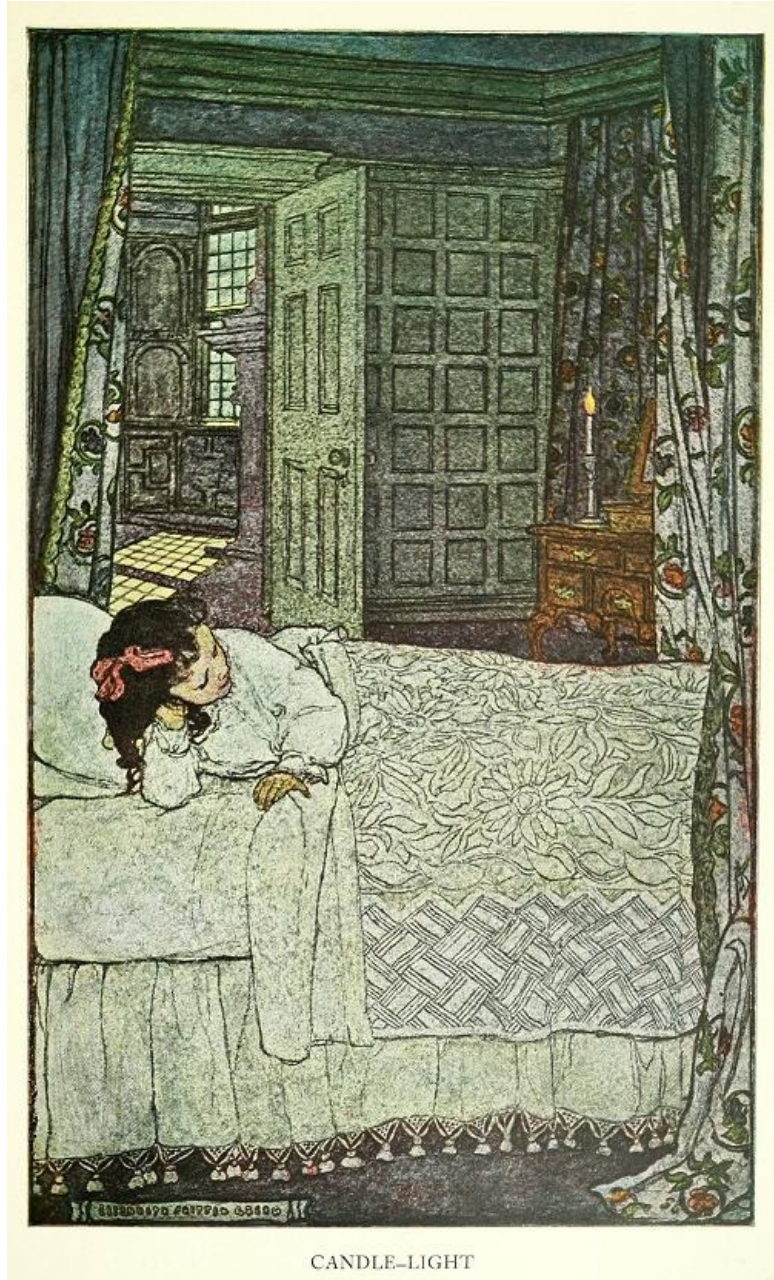
hen I've wished on my first star,
While the rest begin,
And the grass is waking up,
Oh, She calls us in!—
Then She calls us in.

But I wouldn't go, unless
I were sure there'd be

Something more like that, indoors,
Something more to see,—
Beautiful to see.

So She lights the candle then,
Where the shadows are,
And it stands, and holds its breath—
Then it makes a Star,—
Then it makes a Star!

I curl up for my good-night,
Dark, where I can see.
And I watch the Candle-light
Till It looks at me,
Oh, It looks at me!



CANDLE-LIGHT

CANDLE-LIGHT

Cow-Bells



I've followed till the Sun was down,
As low as to the very brink;
And still the pathway kept along,
Around the world, I think.

I've tried to find it, everywhere
A bell would clink, and clink, and call;
But somehow I can never find

That Farthest One of all.

I've been in all the tallest weeds,—
And thistles (with the loudest bees);
And once, across the stepping-stones
And through the cedar-trees.

And now you hear it hushing up,
And then you hear it clink and clink;
And if you found it, it would lead
Around the world, I think!

It sounds so small, and gold, and far—
Far-off, beyond the lily-pool;—
And so, as if there must be there
—Oh, something Wonderful!

Thunder-Storms



Excepting when they're very loud,
And then, when they're almost too bright,
I love to see a Thunder-Storm,
Excepting when it's in the night.

It's harder to remember, then:
*It's Very Wicked not to trust
A Thunder-Storm. Because it's Sure
To know!—And then, besides, you Must.*

*For it will light your Heart up.—Yes;
The Deepest Darkness ever Made
Could Never Hide the Guilty One
... Who feels At All Afraid.*

The thunder is the best of all,—
Except the wading for the Birds;
And then, the Shining in the wet;
—Oh, and the Rainbow, afterwards!

Church-Time



It feels Forever without End,
The time I have to stay.
It's even harder to keep still
Than pray and pray and pray.

The reading happens all the time;
The praying rolls along;
And something makes them always sing
A long, long song.

So when I've nearly gone to sleep,
I make my Penny walk.—
I walk it up and down, to hear
The talk and talk and talk.

And if I lose it on the floor
Before they pass the Plate,
Why then there's nothing more to do
But wait—wait—wait.—

Till, when you'd have to go to sleep
Or else you'd have to die,
They let you Out,—and straight into
The Sky!

*With nests all hiding up the Trees,
And Roads to make you Run:—
And everything like Squirrels!—
In the Sun—the Sun!*

Angels



They are more shy than Snow.
You may look up and try to see one there,
Just when you feel It breathing on your hair;
But then It has to go.—
Somehow, I know.

They want you to believe
How bright they are, and never try to see
Whether they keep their word. For that would be
As if they could deceive.
That makes them grieve.

So, if you want Yours near,
And hide your eyes and keep quite still; and say,
*"Oh, I have Wanted you all day—all day;
Shine at me, Angel, dear!"*
It will be Here.

The Beggar-Man



He only looked like a Beggar-man,
As ragged, just, as any.
But he might have been an Angel, too.
So I gave him my penny.

I waited, till I thought I saw
Him shining through. And when he
Held out his hand, I watched for what
Would happen to my penny.

He might have been an Angel, too!
But I know he wasn't any.
For he frowned at me, like that, you see,
When it wasn't but One penny.

And now that's gone; and I don't care.
I'd rather not have any,
Than keep it, if an Angel came
And asked me for my penny.

The Green Singing-Book

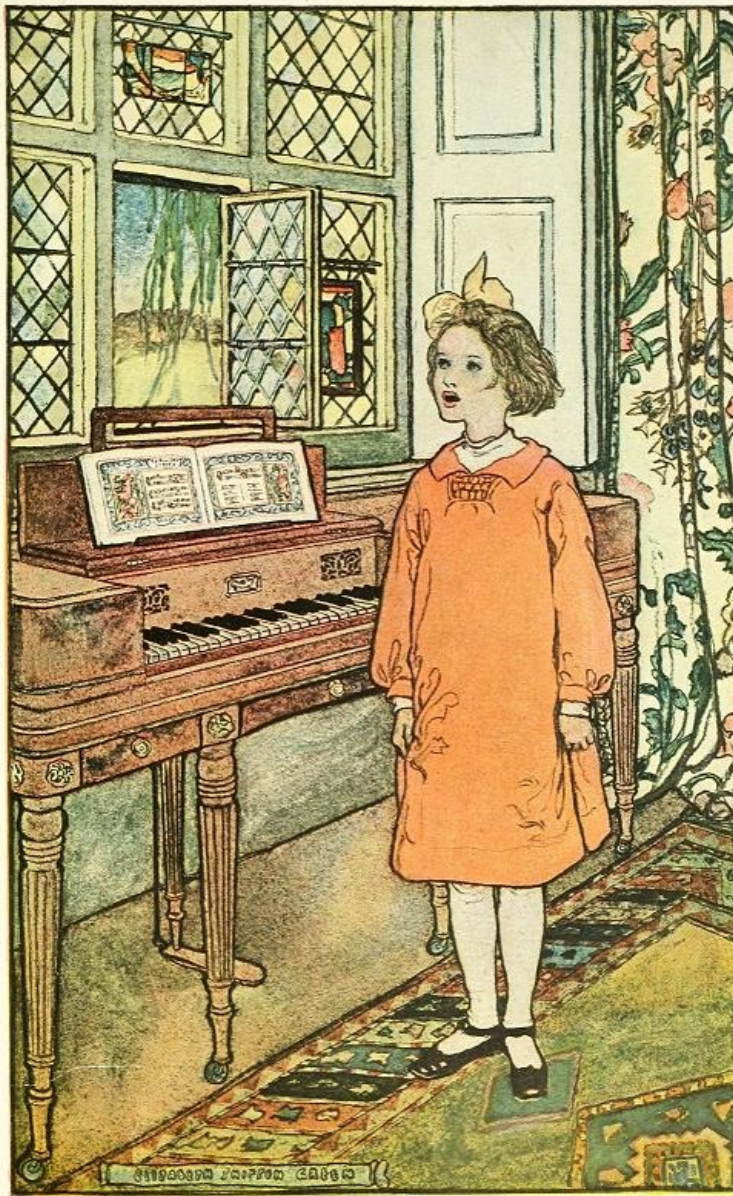


I don't know how to read the words,
Nor how the black things go.
But if you stand it up, and sing,
You never have to know.

The music sounds alike each time
When grown-up people play;
But every time I sing, myself,
It sounds a different way.

And when I've sung the book all through,
And every page, around,
I stand it upside down and sing,
To see how that will sound.

I sing how all the things outside
The window look to me;
The shiny wrinkles in the road,
And then, about my Tree;



THE GREEN SINGING-BOOK

THE GREEN SINGING-BOOK

I sing about the City, too,
 The noises and the wheels;
 And Windows blinking in the sun;—
 I sing the way it feels.

And if a Sparrow flies across,
 I put him in the Song.—
 I sing whatever happens in,
 To make it last for long.

I sing about the things I think
 Of almost everything.
 Sometimes I don't know what to Think
 —Till I begin to Sing.

Wing-Sprouts



It happens when the birds go by
 And leave you far behind;
 And you flutter, till you ache
 All around your mind.—
 Like a Flag,
 Like a Flag
 Flapping at the wind!

It happens when you catch the hills

As blue as yesterday;
You hold your heart in both your hands,
Or it would fly away.
Yes, it would!
Yes, it would!
Away—away—away!

It makes your heart into a Bird
That darts, and leaps, and sings.
—Oh, feel my pinafore, high up!—
Oh, do you think it's Wings?
Do you think—
Do you think—
Oh, couldn't it be Wings?

Early



like to lie and wait, to see
My Mother braid her hair.
It is as long as it can be,
And yet she doesn't care.
I love my Mother's hair.

And then the way her fingers go;
They look so quick and white,—
In and out, and to and fro,
And braiding in the light;
And it is always right.

So then she winds it, shiny brown,
Around her head into a crown,
Just like the day before.
And then she looks, and pats it down,
And looks, a minute more.—
While I stay here, all still and cool.
Oh, isn't Morning beautiful?

The Wind's East



he Wind's east,—Oh, Oh!
Only a little while ago,
To-day was just like yesterday.
But now—now, only Now
The world's all turned some silver way;—
I know how,
I know how!

The Wind's east,
The Wind's east!—
Salt, salt Wind that I love so.
All the things in the garden blow
Wavy gray;—and the Trees all know,—
Trees that never, never can go,
Must know how it would feel to be
There, where the Ships sail to and fro,
Ships on the blue, blue Sea!
And the homesick ones by the bridge up here
Are tugging to get their anchors clear,
And they reach up high, to see.

They catch their breath when they feel the air,
And the rigging stirs, and the lanterns stare;
For they know the tide is high out there,
The gulls go skirling by, out there,—
The gulls and the Wind go free.
And they tug, and they pull, and they wonder so
When will the Captain let them go?—
Oh, Oh,—to Sea,
To Sea!

After-Word



And shall we light the candle now?
And leave, since there is so much more,
Our cupful, and the share of bread,
Here by the open door?

For some one might be wanting it,
If there should chance to come this way,
A very poor Man; or a Bird;—
Or maybe, God, some day.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOOK OF THE LITTLE PAST ***

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